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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9726
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5273
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2871
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1180
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1147
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3900
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2327
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2924
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2861
RUEHBD/AMCONSUL PERTH 1016
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001500

SIPDIS

SURABAYA 0004
DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, DRL/AWH, DRL/IRF
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/07/2018
TAGS: [PGOV PHUM KIRF ID](#)
SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY RICKMAN MEETS WITH JEWISH COMMUNITY
IN SURABAYA

JAKARTA 00001500 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Surabaya Principal Officer Caryn R. McClelland for reasons 1.4 (B and D)

¶1. (U) Summary: Special Envoy to Monitor & Combat Anti-Semitism Gregg Rickman traveled to Surabaya July 30, 2008, following a visit to Jakarta. S/E Rickman, accompanied by Karen Paikin, from the Office to Monitor & Combat Anti-Semitism, and Yakov Barouch, a Rabbi living in Jakarta, visited the synagogue, one of only two in Indonesia, and the Jewish cemetery, and to meet with members of the Jewish community, which numbers less than 20. End Summary.

SURABAYA SYNAGOGUE

¶2. (C) During his July 30 visit to Surabaya, Special Envoy Rickman had the opportunity to meet with members of the local Jewish community and visit Surabaya's synagogue and Jewish cemetery. Surabaya's synagogue, originally the home and office of a Dutch physician, has served as a synagogue since ¶1939. There is no security other than a low, wrought-iron fence surrounding the property. Members of the Sayer family act as the synagogue's caretakers and live in an adjacent house, part of what appears to be a single complex within a gated area. Joseph Sayer and his wife Rivka live there with a married daughter, Hanna, and a grandchild (please protect). Two other grandchildren are currently studying abroad: one in the UK and one in the U.S. The Sayers hold Dutch passports, but have lived in Indonesia their entire lives.

¶3. (C) The synagogue does not possess any items that Rickman or the Sayers consider valuable, the Torahs having been removed by the Japanese in 1943 during the occupation. The synagogue is only used for services on major holidays, and even then usually only when visitors come from outside Surabaya to lead the services. Mr. Sayer and his daughter told Special Envoy Rickman that they will discourage the grandchildren from coming back to settle in Indonesia once they finish their studies, because as they put it, "There is nothing for us here."

14. (C) While there have been no incidents over the past couple of years, Mr. Sayer recalled a demonstration two years ago where an angry mob gathered in front of the synagogue and demanded that the "rabbi come out." Although not a rabbi, Mr. Sayer said he feared he would have been killed had he left his locked house at that time. He added that the police never responded to this or any other incidents, which used to be frequent. The Sayers explained that they are fortunate to have Madurese neighbors, an ethnic group with a reputation as the "tough guys" of Indonesia. Mr. Sayer said that several times his neighbors chased off demonstrators and would-be troublemakers, not because they have any particular sympathy for the Sayers or the synagogue, but simply because they did not want their neighborhood trashed. Mr. Sayer said the family employs some members of the Madurese community as groundskeepers and domestic help. Mr. Sayer stated that he has no faith that police would respond to any future protests or demonstrations.

VISIT TO CEMETERY

15. (U) Surabaya's Jewish cemetery occupies a portion of a much larger Christian cemetery. The parcel appeared to be no less well maintained than other parts of the cemetery, and there was no sign of any recent vandalism or graffiti. Two members of the local Jewish community told S/E Rickman, however, that some ground originally belonging to the Jewish cemetery had been taken without compensation and that it has been made clear that there would be no chance for the Jewish section to expand beyond its current boundaries. There may be space for another six to eight burial plots. There are probably about 10 times that many graves existing.

JAKARTA 00001500 002.2 OF 002

SURABAYA,S JEWISH COMMUNITY AND HISTORY

16. (C) S/E Rickman also visited Helen Nasim (please protect) in her home. She has one married son and a grandson. She expressed pessimism about opportunities for her family remaining in Indonesia, and said that she actively tries to keep her Jewish identity a secret. She was adamant about not having her picture taken and said she fears what would happen to her if her Jewish heritage became widely known. She does have internet access and values being able to connect with other members of the Jewish community overseas.

17. (C) In conversations with the Sayers, Mrs. Nasim, and Rabbi Barouch, S/E Rickman learned that there were approximately 1,000 Jews living in the city at the time of the Japanese invasion and occupation. Mr. Sayer said that Germany had wanted Japan to round up Jews in Indonesia and send them to Nazi concentration camps in Europe, but Japan had refused. It did, however, establish camps of its own in Indonesia. Mr. Sayer and his family were taken initially to a camp in Surabaya, then transferred by rail to Jakarta, and finally to a labor camp outside Bandung, where Mr. Sayer's father died. From a community of 1,000 sixty-five years ago, the Jewish community in Surabaya numbers less than 20 now. The mainstays of the community do not think it will last another generation. Rabbi Barouch said the Surabaya synagogue and synagogue in Manado, the rabbi's hometown, are allowed to continue as historical sites, but that no new synagogues could be established in Indonesia.

HUME